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I'Sigirari

MASAI SOCIAL CUSTOMS.

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101 These notes have been prepared from information collected from the Masai who occupy the south-east corner of the Southern Reserve, between Kilimanjaro and the Chylulu Hills. They belong to a large
614] section of the tribe called I'Sigirari. This section unlike other Masai sections is divided into two sub-sections, the Ingidongi, to which all "medicine" men belong and the Il-Kisongo, the majority of whom live in Tanganyika Territory.

The Kisongo living in Kenya distinguish themselves from those of Tanganyika by assuming yet a third name "Il Oitokitok." This name is undoubtedly derived from that of a spring "Engoitokitok," meaning "bubbling water." It was in the vicinity of this spring that the Masai settled when first they inhabited that part of the country.

561 I propose to deal with certain customs and ceremonies connected with the founding of a new age group. For the benefit of those who may not be conversant with this form of tribal government, may I briefly explain that the Masai tribe is divided into age groups called *il poror* or *ol-aji*. All youths circumcised during a specified period of years are said to belong to the same warrior age and together they form one age-group. In some sections an age-group is formed of two distinct divisions, a senior and a junior, known as the right-hand circumcision and the left-hand circumcision. Later a group passes from the status of warriors to that of elders and thus make way for a new age-group to rise to warrior rank.

[881] Masai boys are circumcised usually between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. The ceremonies which recommence about every seven years extend over a period of about five years. When the majority of the youths are circumcised and a warrior age-group of considerable number is assured, a movement is made to prevent any more boys from joining that group. Those responsible for the movement are the elders of the age-group next senior to the warriors at the time. These elders are to become sponsors and instructors to the members of a new age-group for the formation of which they make preparations.

They first send for a few of the bigger uncircumcised boys and explain that it is proposed to form a new age. In order to do this a ceremony called *endungori* must be held. The boys receive their
[292] instructions and immediately don short cloaks made from black calf skins and anoint their heads with red earth that they may resemble warriors. They then set off in procession round the country on what

is called an *ol amal*. The boys may carry knives for defence but not spears, for it is said that a spear is a sign of force, and their quest is a peaceful one. Each boy must carry a bow, for the bow is a token of peace. Furthermore it ensures that any reasonable request the boys may make during the *ol amal* will be granted. No Masai may refuse the request of one who carries a bow in his hand. The boys take no arrows with them. They visit all the principal villages and in dance and song they announce the object of their visit. They then seek out all the bigger boys of the village and add them to their number. If they wish to spend a night at a village they beg an ox for food from the elder of their sponsor's age-group. Elders of other age-groups present them with milk to drink. In this way the news is spread far and wide and finally the boys, now of considerable numbers, return to the elders who despatched them, taking as a gift a large quantity of honey. Then a special village is erected in which only the boys' sponsors and their families may live. The boys borrow ostrich feathers and lion mane head-dresses from the warriors and on the appointed day they collect at the elders' village.

The ceremony commences with a dance called *engibata;* for this, the boys form three files, one wearing ostrich feather head-dresses, the second wearing lion mane head-dresses, and a third, of boys who have decorated their bodies with broad stripes of white earth to resemble zebras.

The latter must be quite nude; those who wish may wear thigh-bells. They may not carry weapons of any sort, but each carries a thin wand, the length of a spear. After much dancing, the boys form a procession and walk round inside the circle of huts following two leaders, one of whom blows a Kudu horn from time to time. The procession then halts and the leader prays aloud to *Engai Narok* —the Black God, to shower his blessings on the boys. This prayer has been taught them beforehand by the elders, some of whom stand by and prompt when necessary. When the prayers are over, the elders take the boys outside the village and spend some time instructing them in their duties to their sponsors and to the tribe. A return is then made to the village and the elders bring a fire-stick, the one called *ol-piron*, also a male circumcision knife and a small dead bird. This bird may be of any kind other than a dove. The elders break the fire-stick before the assembled boys. They then place a curse upon the circumcision knife and taking the dead bird they break one of its legs and pierce one of its eyes—presumably as an indication of the ill which will befall any boy who dares to be circumcised before the curse is taken off the knife.

In this way, the elders formally lay claim to the sponsorship of a new age-group. From that time the boys refer to their sponsors as *Il-piron*, whilst the elders refer to the boys as *Il-piron*.

561 Soon after the *endungore* ceremony, the elders take three or four of their charges to visit the " medicine man." They take with them three or four new gourds as presents for the " medicine man," who is called *ol-oiboni*. They must also take with them the bark and root of a tree called *imokongora*. I have not been able to identify the tree; [824] it is said to be scarce and is not found in the Loitokitok area. The root and bark are ground to powder and used to make a medicine named *emasho sirua*, an ingredient used in the preparation of a wide variety of charms. The elders inform the " medicine-man " that they have broken the fire-stick and present the boys to him and say " *Ol piron lang elle, kira nalo* "—" This is our fire-stick, we are one."

561 On their return home the boys' leaders seek one of their number
624 to appoint as their spokesman called *Ol ai gurenani*. They make no special efforts but during the many debates, to which they devote [537] much time, they note those who show special ability; but ability to speak well is not in itself sufficient; there are other considerations of far greater importance.

There are certain families whose sons must not be chosen for they would certainly die if elected; again, the counsel of other families has an evil reputation and must be avoided. Nor would it do to select a spokesman from the *Endigongi* or medicine-man section or from the clans reputed to be unlucky.

The ideal *l'aigwenani* is one born of Masai parents in Masai country of a family from which *l'aigwenak* of former age-groups have been chosen. He should be wealthy if possible and a member of a lucky clan, must be energetic, not given to favouritism, and known to be fond of his tribe. That he should be an outstandingly good speaker matters not, provided that he satisfies the other conditions. It is said that his efficiency in debate will improve after he is appointed.

The names of possible candidates are submitted to the *il-piron* elders for consideration; the elders do not actually select a boy but prevent any unwise choice being made. The responsibility of making a choice rests with the boys themselves. It is particularly a matter for the leading boys of whom there are probably several by this time. [554] They are called *ingopior*, and are those who have shown ability and strength of character during the many debates already held.

Usually a *l'aigwenani* is chosen from among these *ingopior*. They discuss the matter secretly amongst themselves sending off one of their number on some pretext in order to be able to discuss him freely. When a decision is made the boys call some of the *il-piron* elders and send for the boy chosen. When he comes the *ingopior* say to him: " *Iye kintaa ol'ngwenani* "—We make you our *aigwenani*. If he

shows reluctance, as he may—for many shun election to the office— he is seized by the boys and held until he agrees. Other boys set off to relate the news to his family. When the family has been informed the new *aiguenani* is presented with his badge of office called *ol kumo orok*—the black club. This club is made of olive wood. It must be quite straight and unlikely to break easily. It need not necessarily be black in colour. The club is blessed by the *il-piron* elders who spit honey wine over it; it is then blessed by the *ingopior* boys in similar fashion and handed to the *l'aiguenani*. He too is spat upon in blessing and prayers are offered that he may have strength, wisdom, and long life. Later the boys present their *l'aiguenani* with a heifer and a goat.

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If at any time the boys go against his wishes, the *l'aiguenani* may resign by throwing his club to the ground before a meeting of the boys. Should they be dissatisfied with him they may make him resign by taking away his club. They may even take away the heifer if his offence is severe.

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When the boys have elected their *l'aiguenani* the *il-piron* elders take him, together with a few boys to visit the medicine man. The medicine man always accepts the spokesman presented to him, and prepares for him a special medicine called *ol oingoimyakia*—the red bull. This the spokesman is made to drink; it is said to preserve him from witchcraft of the medicine men. In addition, the spokesman is given various charms for the benefit of the tribe. Possibly one is to prevent rinderpest in cattle, another to cause the cows to calve freely, another to prevent malaria. Usually the charms are sewn in leather bags and are always accompanied by very intricate instructions as to their use. All these charms must be paid for by those who expect to benefit. An instance was related to me of a ceremony held at Loitokitok in 1926 for which a famous medicine man Sandenyo supplied the charm. Its purpose was to prevent the old men of the tribe from dying until they reached a great age. Sandenyo received 49 heifers and bullocks in payment. The medicine man does not state his price but it is usual to pay generously for his services as he is a dangerous person to offend.

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Obtaining charms from a medicine man is not a matter to be undertaken lightly. Those who accompany the spokesman are always people of proved intelligence and good memory. Charms are always given with much complicated directions as to their use. If any one of the instructions are overlooked the charm may be rendered useless or may even work evil against its users. The Masai sometimes find that their purchases do not have the effect they desire and report the matter to the medicine man; the latter never fails to point out where an error in the method of its use occurred—and probably effects

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another sale! Sometimes circumstances prevent the immediate use of medicines obtained: a drought for instance might make it impossible to collect people for the ceremony; in such a case the charm might get old and lose its efficiency; or perhaps the object of its use may be forgotten. If this happens the medicine is conveniently mislaid or is thrown away, but if so a report must be made to the medicine man, for he will have seen what happened to his medicine and will be angry, if its fate is concealed from him.

After some years the boys are circumcised, and become moran warriors. As soon as most of them are circumcised the *ingopior* plan to form into separate companies in readiness for residence in warrior villages called *imanyat*. Messages are sent and the warriors of all clans are called together by means of an *ol-amal* just as the boys did before the *endungore* ceremony. The number of companies, called *i'sirit*, to be formed, also the names to be given to them are decided on beforehand by the *ingopiri* warriors. After discussion a division is decided upon. One warrior representing each company to be formed leaves the assembly, goes a little way and striking the haft of his spear with his club to attract attention, he calls: "*En alo Il Mirisho*" or "*En alo Il Tetiuri*"—" This way the Mirisho, this way the Tetiuri." The warriors then rise and join the man calling the name of the company they wish to join.

Groups of five will go together, to join the same company. A company may include warriors of more than one clan though as a rule the majority are of the same clan.

If the warriors of one clan are too few to form a separate unit they join the unit of another clan. If the clan is a very big one, the warriors may form two or even more *sirits*. Having joined a *siril* a warrior may retract at any time before that *siril* forms the first warrior village. Once the warrior villages are formed, any warrior who leaves his *sirit* to join another, incurs the bitter resentment of the others. In some cases a fine of cattle is inflicted.

The *sirits* once formed, the warriors now approach the *il-piron* elders with a view to holding the ceremony of drilling—without which the first warrior village or manyata of new age-group may not be erected.

The *eathurpori* ceremony or the breaking of the fire stick, though it effectively holds up the circumcising ceremonies, is not finally binding. It sometimes happens that the medicine man decides that a left-hand circumcision shall be held, in which case all the boys, the *Il piron* planned to make their special care, will be lost to them, for the boys will be circumcised to form one age with the ——— or right-hand circumcision moran.

If however there is to be no left-hand circumcision the *Il piron* elders arrange to hold the fire-drilling ceremony. 561

This ceremony finally binds together the *Il piron* elders and their moran charges. The warriors and the *Il piron* elders decide on the suitable site for the first warrior village. The warriors, together with their mothers, sisters and cattle move in close to the site chosen and for the time being occupy any deserted village in the vicinity. When the warriors announce that they are in readiness, the elders give orders that on the morrow all the cattle are to move to a new village. Next morning at sunrise, the *Il piron* tell the warriors to bring the heifers, four *suria*, four calves (all black). The heifers must have perfect eyes, straight tails, each must have four teats, in fact they must be perfect in every way. The warriors must find also a young bull, either a black one, or a fawn one; it must be perfect in eye, have erect horns, and its dam must still be alive.

The warriors are warned that after the ceremony, the bull must not be castrated, or sold, or slaughtered for food.

The nine cattle having been selected, eight moran are called for, and eight girls. The warriors must have unblemished eyes, must not have killed a Masai, or have committed any serious offence against tribal laws; also they must not all be right-handed. [828]

The girls, too, must be free from blemish and must not have reached the age of puberty. The warriors don a short coat of black calf skin, make a circle of white round the eyes, down each cheek meeting under the chin, and each carries a bow in his hand. The warriors and girls then drive the cattle to the centre of the chosen site and prevent them from running away. The rest of the warriors watch this proceeding until as soon as the ceremonial bull and the heifer have taken up their positions; the remainder are driven forward to the waiting group. The warriors then seize the ceremonial bull by the horns and twist its head so that the right side of its face is uppermost. A piece of hide which must have been cut from the back of an ox which when slaughtered was found to be in perfect health, is then placed on the bull's upturned face. The *Il piron* elders who performed the first ceremony were dressed in robes made from sheep skins. New fire-sticks are then produced, placed on the bull's cheek and fire made by drilling, by the *Il piron* elders. [392] [393] [302]

The smouldering charred wood falls on the hide, pieces of frayed cedar bark are added, and the glowing ember is blown into a flame, when a fire will start with dry clean wood. The fire is then placed on the ground in the centre of the village; the place is given the name *osinyo*. Large pieces of wood are added. One elder is then left to look after the fire whilst the others walk in a circle round the assembled

561 herds. They are followed by the moran and the women who cut bush to mark where the elder has walked. When the circle is demarcated, they set to work to build a thick thorn fence to enclose the village. [824] By the time the work is finished, it is evening. A special piece of olive wood is brought in readiness. The log used in a recent ceremony is described as being four to five feet long, and of the thickness of a man's thigh. It had been part of the trunk of a tree, not a branch. A tree leaning in the direction of the rising sun had to be found. When it was cut, it had not to be allowed to fall to the ground.

In the evening before the cattle return, the olive log is brought and one end is placed in the fire. The wood is ——— and as the log burns away it is pushed further into the fire. The mothers of the morans each come with four small pieces of olive wood to light at the fire; this they take to their temporary but made of hide to start their fires. No other source of fire may be used. Great care must be taken that the log is burnt completely. A close guard is kept over it to prevent the cattle from disturbing it and to prevent evil-wishers from taking away the log to make black magic. The morans guard the log through the night and the morning.

[714] In the morning all the morans come and form a circle round the fire; they bring their spears, and wear lion-mane and head-dress. Four elders of known good character, with wives and children, then walk round the morans; two walk one way, two the other. One of each pair has a gourd of milk, the other a gourd of honey wine. As they walk they fill their mouths with milk or honey wine and blow it on to the sitting morans.

561 Each girl has a slipper of green grass which when removed is held in the left hand, the gourd in the right. As the liquid is sprayed, 539 so is the green grass waved toward the moran. As they walk the 782 elders call down the blessing of the *Engare-Narok*.

Engai!

Entomunyana. Enjuru.
Entobulu! Engai.
Entaa il kulabang o l'eng Ai. Hai.
Metapaash ndai il kuluki.
Entiaki il oibanjook, aya
Afa il kejek l'emelepo! Ecapa.

Eteyo Lenana; Supeit o Mbateyan enjuon
Metagolo indae il lugony
Entan ol Donyo Pibon
Entan Koirnarek
Entoning en eyo il o minji.

Entumunyana! Engai! Enjuru! Engai! 561
Entaa Il kulalang o l'engai! Hai! 539
Metapesh andae il kuluki Engai Narok 782
Entiaki il oibaa inyoh ayaapiai hejeh l'emalepo!
Eteyo Lenana O Supeet O'Mbatian anguvu Gai
Entubulu! Engai! Metagele indae il luginy
Entaa Ol Donyo Pilon! Engai!
Endoisho! Entoyna il ——— ——— Engai!
Entoinyu nirihirihi! Engai!
Enoto si isiaiyeh! Engai Narok!
Metanyoyu ndae Engai! Metanyoyu ndae il ufa!
Entamelono eitaa enoishi o hole!
Metoripo ndae il oingoni sifia l'enghaworie! Engai;
Ol poror lang meta magilani. Engai!

Be trustworthy! Oh return safely! O God.
Become ye ours and of God.
May the illnesses pass you by.
Wish those who hate us, that they may find dry rivers on their journeys.
Lenana and Sufeit and Mbatian wish thy safe return!
Grow up! Become possessed of wise heads!
Become as great as Kilimanjaro!
Be the father of my children; be fathers of boys and girls,
Be fathers of children, and bring them up well!
Have many wives!
May God love you! May the moon love you!
Be as sweet to us as milk and honey.
May the red bull of the night guard thee,
May our age be the bravest.

As soon as the prayer is finished the warriors rise and disperse. Later they reassemble and celebrate the founding of their age by dancing and singing. Thus is a new Masai age founded. Henceforward the warriors live apart from the rest of the tribe. 561